



City of Charleston

Joseph P. Riley, Jr.
Mayor

November 12, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama
ATTN: Ashley Tate-Gilmore
c/o The United States Senate
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1305

Dear President-Elect Obama:

I cannot adequately express my sense of gratitude to you, Michelle and your daughters for offering yourselves to our country at this important time in our history. Nor can I adequately express my pride in you and your election as our next President. You scaled a mountain that seemed unreachable and in doing so you lifted the spirits of every citizen of our country and people throughout our world. I was so proud and honored to be in your corner.

There are two things I wanted to discuss with you during the campaign, but I always felt awkward about taking even a minute of your time during the all-important job of running a great team and getting elected.

The first is the need for a national urban policy. I mentioned this very briefly to you when we met in my office early in the campaign and again in Miami and told you I would send a follow-up communication but again wanted to wait until the campaign was over. "National Urban Policy" sounds boring or comes across as a nicely wrapped package of nothing more than a list for goodies for cities. It is neither. The fact is this: we are an urban nation, or in your better expression before the Conference of Mayors in Miami, a nation of metropolitan communities. It is essential -- to our success as a country, to our competitiveness economically, to the livability of and inspiration of our towns and cities -- that our country act like it understands that we are no longer a rural nation, but one of the most urban countries in the world. Jane Jacobs, in her book, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, said "cities maintaining the art of civilized cities give up the opportunity of progressing further." What is needed, respectfully, sir, is for you to create the Office of Urban Policy in the White House, as you have discussed, and have that office lead a government-wide strategic exercise to develop a



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comprehensive and strategic urban policy that focuses a new lens on every part of our national government asking a fundamental and basic question: do they, through every decision they make, enhance the livability, sustainability, beauty, order and competitiveness of our towns and cities?

Of course, this is not simply about new or better housing programs or expanded urban initiatives. This is about every branch, limb and leaf of the Federal Government - from the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of Energy, the General Services Administration, the Department of Defense, the Postal Service, the Department of Education and all the others, understanding that it must consider the quality of towns and cities and the impact of their decisions on them every step of the way. Currently that is far from the reality we face. I see daily that many people in senior leadership positions in our country do not have the foggiest notion about how to support and enhance our towns, cities and metropolitan areas. You said it best in Miami before the Mayors: we should stop looking at cities as problems and view them rather as great opportunities. Because, in fact, they are and represent our great future as a nation.

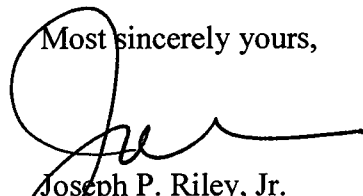
Cities are enormous assets for our country. The more we enhance them and leverage them, the stronger our nation's economy and its culture will be. Also, as you know, the more we reinforce our towns and cities, the more sustainable our country becomes. Cities, when well designed and enhanced with good transportation infrastructure, an inspirational and accessible public realm, walkable, bikable neighborhoods served well with public transportation, produce far less greenhouse gases and are infinitely more sustainable, happier and more successful places for people to live.

I knew this would be a difficult subject to raise during the campaign because in a political sense it can be boring and easily misunderstood. I do sincerely believe, however, Mr. President-Elect, that this could be an important lasting contribution of your Administration.

The other matter I was timid about mentioning because of your time during the campaign is the planned International African American Museum here in Charleston, the point of entry to America for more than 40% of the Africans forcibly transported here. I need not elaborate on it now, but I would in a few months appreciate just a few minutes of your time to tell you about this powerful institution that we plan to create that will be a great benefit to our nation and its people.

With unbounded pride and devotion, I remain

Most sincerely yours,



Joseph P. Riley, Jr.
Mayor, City of Charleston

JPR,jr/rd